Assiniboine River Management Advisory Board

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE WATER-USE STRATEGY FOR THE ASSINIBOINE RIVER BASIN

A Report to

The Manitoba Minister of Conservation

1999 – 2000 Activities

ASSINIBOINE RIVER MANAGEMENT ADVISORY BOARD

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1999-2000 ACTIVITIES

ANNUAL REPORT

TO

THE MANITOBA MINISTER FOR MANITOBA CONSERVATION

PREPARED BY:

THE ASSINIBOINE RIVER MANAGEMENT ADVISORY BOARD

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION _____ *1*

BACKGROUND _____ *2*

BOARD MEMBERSHIP _____ *3*

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES (1999-2000) _____ *4*

1.0 Healthy River Workshop _____ **4**

2.0 Manitoba Water Rights Acts Review _____ **4**

3.0 A New Approach to Water Management in Manitoba / Restructuring the Board _____ **5**

4.0 Water Quality Initiatives _____ **6**

5.0 Upper Assiniboine River Basin Study _____ **7**

6.0 Shellmouth Reservoir Regulation Liaison Committee _____ **8**

7.0 Liaison Activities _____ **8**

8.0 Reviews _____ **9**

9.0 On-Site Tour _____ **9**

10.0 Other Activities _____ **10**

11.0 Appendices _____ **11**

Summary of Correspondence to the Minister (1999-2000) - Appendix I _____ **12**

Highlights of Board's Actions and Recommendations (1994-2000) - Appendix II _____ **14**

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INTRODUCTION

A significant part of the Board's activities during the past year focused on planning and hosting a Healthy Rivers Workshop. A report on the Board's findings from the workshop was submitted to the Manitoba Minister for Conservation in December, 1999.

The Board continued to monitor the conduct of the Upper Assiniboine River Basin Study and represented stakeholder interests in ongoing activities of the Shellmouth Reservoir Regulation Liaison Committee and other committees.

Considerable time was devoted by the Board considering new water management strategies for Manitoba and a restructuring of the Board to better serve these emerging needs.

The Board, its staff and individual members participated in numerous workshop and meetings related to irrigation, drainage, water use and allocation and other basin management activities. Board representation at municipal and public meetings, technical workshops and planning sessions and a variety of government sponsored seminars and reviews provided a communication forum for the work of the Board.

The Board's advice, guidance and concerns regarding Assiniboine River Basin management, in particular, and provincial water practices in general have been forwarded to the Minister throughout the past year.

Highlights of the Board's activities during the 1999-2000 fiscal year are summarized in the following report.

BACKGROUND

The Board was established to develop a sustainable water-use strategy for the Assiniboine River Basin with particular attention to be given to the Assiniboine River. Members represent stakeholder interests along the Assiniboine River extending from the Saskatchewan/Manitoba border to the City of Winnipeg. Municipal, landowner, aboriginal, environmental, urban, irrigation, conservation and other public and private sector interests are represented by the Board.

The Board's Terms of Reference are as follows:

- To assess the present and future needs and demands for water in the Assiniboine Basin.

- To develop a sustainable water-use strategy, consistent with the Provincial Water Policies, that meets the demands identified.

- To advise the Manitoba Minister of Conservation on water allocations from the Assiniboine River in the interests of all Manitobans.

The Board was appointed in 1994 and reports to the Minister for Conservation.

An Executive Secretary serves the Board on a part-time basis. Manitoba Natural Resources provides office space and administrative support to the Board at 200 Saulteaux Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Mr. Joe Omichinski
Central Plains Corporation
Oakville, Mb.

Mr. Gene Nerbas
Shellmouth-Assiniboine Valley
Economic Development Group
Russell, Mb.

Mr. Albert Nabe
R.M. of Shell River
Roblin, Mb.

Mr. Ted Poyser
Conservation Districts Commission
Winnipeg, Mb.

Ms. Alison Elliott
Consultant
Winnipeg, Mb

Mr. Roy Stevenson
Little Saskatchewan River Basin
Rivers, Mb.

Mr. Calvin Pompana
Sioux Valley Band
Winnipeg, Mb

Mr. Mike Shkolny
City of Winnipeg
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Mr. Ted Snure
City of Brandon
Brandon, Mb

Mr. Stuart Briese
Association of Manitoba Municipalities
Neepawa, Mb.

Mr. Ian MacKenzie
City of Portage la Prairie
Portage la Prairie, Mb.

Mr. Larry Walker
R.M. of Miniota
Miniota, Mb.

Mr. Rod McLaren
Association of Manitoba Irrigators
Carberry, Mb.

Dr. Ian Dickson
Winnipeg, Mb.
(Executive Secretary and
Acting Chairman)

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES (1999-2000)

1.0 Healthy River Workshop

The Board hosted a workshop on November 4 and 5, 1999 to explore methods of determining what constitutes a "healthy" river, and to manage the Assiniboine River as a "healthy" river system. More than 40 government and non-government interests were represented at the workshop. Fifty-seven people participated over the two days.

The workshop agenda provided an opportunity to consider an ecosystem management approach to determining requirements for a healthy river; to provide an update on the current status of river management practices; and to become familiar with river enhancement programs elsewhere.

Results of the workshop were outlined in a report forwarded to the Minister in January, 2000.

2.0 Manitoba Water Rights Act Review

The Board has recommended a comprehensive review of the Manitoba Water Rights Act as a key component for enhancing the provincial water management program. Early on, the Board targeted provincial legislation governing water allocation and protection as deserving of attention. The absence of a detailed Water Management plan for the Assiniboine River and the lack of specific guidelines to direct the use of its water was identified as critical to the management of the river by the Board as early as 1995. While departmental initiatives suggested that approval for such an undertaking would soon be forthcoming, a comprehensive review of the Act remains outstanding.

During the past year, the Board continued to encourage the department to commence such a review. Specific recommendations concerning revisions to the Act were forwarded to the Minister in June, 1999.

3.0 A New Approach to Water Management In Manitoba / Restructuring the Board

During its tenure, the Board has shared its awareness and concern for the growing importance of water to Manitobans. New sustainable development legislation, increased environmental protection demands and rapid changes in economic development sectors, particularly agriculture have hastened the need for a new way of doing business involving this important resource.

Most recently, but particularly during the past year, the Board has devoted considerable time to examining a new approach to landscape management wherein water would play a prominent role. A broad-based or regional approach to water planning has been encouraged by recent findings from the Consultation On Sustainable Development Implementation (COSDI) Review, The Capital Region Review, The Manitoba Water Commission Report On the 1997 Flood, the Review of the Manitoba Conservation Districts Program, and, Manitoba Water Resource Workshops Related to Manitoba's Water Management Needs.

Working with others, the Board prepared a discussion paper concerning a sustainable development approach to water management and outlined the possible framework for a new authority to implement such a scheme (Sustainable Development Water Authority). This draft material has been held in abeyance pending government response to the COSDI and Capital Region Review reports. It continues, however, to focus the work of the Board in these rapidly changing times.

As well, during the past year, the Board has concerned itself with its own ongoing role and mandate. The Board is satisfied that its advisory role to the department and its numerous recommendations concerning a sustainable water-use strategy have outlined a framework for change that would serve Manitoba's water management program well in the future. The Board would welcome the opportunity to assist in bringing about such change.

The Board has proposed that it be restructured to assist the department and other government agencies in water planning and decisions respecting water. Expanding stakeholder interest on the Board to include government and the corporate business sector has been recommended. In addition to its advisory role, the Board has proposed that its mandate be expanded to include a "coordinator" and "facilitator" responsibility to assist in water management planning and implementation. The Board shares the view that it could play a key role in coordinating and facilitating the input by a diversity of sustainable development, environmental, socio-economic and public education interests required by future water management considerations. However, the Board recognizes that its role and mandate must be consistent with the overall provincial approach to more broad based regional planning and be compatible with the recent integration process involving the Manitoba Departments of Natural Resources and Environment.

4.0 Water Quality Initiatives

The Board continues to promote water quality as one of the most important considerations in any future water management plan for Manitoba. Together with water supply, these two aspects of river basin management take preference in water planning and allocation activities. It was not unusual, therefore, for the Board to be requested to outline its position respecting proposed economic development initiatives in

southwestern Manitoba, with particular reference to the hog industry and Assiniboine River water quality.

The Board met independently with representatives of government, industry and the public sector to better understand and formulate an opinion respecting the impact of the hog industry on the Assiniboine River and related water bodies. The Board outlined its position and recommendations in this regard to the Minister early in 1999.

As a consequence of this endeavour, the Board was requested to contribute to a provincial submission requesting increased provincial funding for water quality monitoring associated with the Assiniboine River. As well, because of a shared interest by a number of key stakeholder interests (City of Brandon, Manitoba Environment and Natural Resources, City of Portage la Prairie), the Minister approved a Board proposal to explore a river management partnership framework involving those stakeholders referenced above and others. The Board met with representatives of the Roblin/Russell area including municipal officials and non-profit organizations (e.g. Chambers of Commerce) at its first meeting to determine interest by Assiniboine River stakeholders in the establishment of such a partnership. This initiative has been held in abeyance pending clarification by the new government in this regard.

5.0 Upper Assiniboine River Basin Study

The Board continued to monitor progress and the conduct of the Assiniboine River Basin Study. Individual Board members participated as members of watershed sub-committees and represented the Board at local public meetings.

Representatives of the Study made presentations to the Board. Based on this information and other sources, the Board added its support to a recommendation by

the Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Canada Study Team to have the study period extended to June, 2000.

6.0 Shellmouth Reservoir Regulation Liaison Committee

Dr. Dickson and Mr. Ted Snure represented the Board on the Shellmouth Reservoir Regulation Liaison Committee. The Committee continues to serve as an effective tool for local elected officials and other stakeholder to provide input to the operation of the reservoir. The Department and regional and local interests appear to be well served by this communication forum.

7.0 Liaison Activities

Through its individual members, the Board continues to have representation on the Rivers Reservoir Advisory Committee (Roy Stevenson) and the Portage Diversion Liaison Committee (Ian MacKenzie).

Dr. Dickson represented the Board on the Advisory Committee established as part of the Consultation On Sustainable Development Implementation (COSDI) Review. Mr. Stuart Briese (Board Member) and Mr. Bryan Gray (Executive Director, Manitoba Sustainable Development Coordinating Unit) provided periodic updates on the conduct of the review to the Board. The Board has employed the findings from this review in its deliberations concerning future water management strategies.

The Board continued informal consultation with the Chairman and staff of the Bow River Basin Water Council in Calgary, Alberta. As well, staff of the Fraser Basin Council, British Columbia participated in Board workshops. As a member of the Partners for the Saskatchewan River Basin, the Board is also made aware of new initiatives in neighbouring watersheds.

8.0 Reviews

The Board received presentations from the Central Manitoba Irrigation Association and made recommendations to the Minister concerning specific irrigation project proposals. The Board participated in a review of an "Irrigation Strategy" prepared by the Association of Irrigators in Manitoba.

The Board worked closely with representatives of the Manitoba Conservation District program during the past year. Presentations concerning the current status of district programs were received by the Board and Board staff participated in planning activities related to the Conservation Districts annual meeting.

Dr. Dickson continued to represent the Board in the COSDI consultation process, the Capital Region review and municipal meetings.

9.0 On-Site Tour

The Board completed on-site inspections of a variety of land-use projects and conservation initiatives in the Russell/Roblin area during the mid-summer. Drainage activities and potential storage sites were examined. The Board toured the new ski hill development in the Russell area.

Following the tour, recommendations concerning the development of the Assissippi Park and operational constraints imposed on the Shellmouth Reservoir were forwarded to the Minister. As well, the possibility of using the Upper Assiniboine River Basin Study results and participants of the study in a pilot project for developing a water management plan for the area was brought to the Minister's attention.

10.0 Other Activities

The Board utilized every opportunity to communicate its findings to the public sector and special interest groups. Dr. Dickson presented the results of the Boards Healthy Rivers Workshop at the Manitoba Conservation Districts Annual Convention. Through special workshops, the work of the Board was outlined at the Association of Manitoba Municipalities Annual Convention. A Board strategy for water management in the Assiniboine River Basin was presented at a seminar sponsored by the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation.

Board members participated in workshops to review Water Use and Allocation in Manitoba and Dr. Dickson continued throughout the past year to work with Manitoba Water Resources and other government staff on a daily and as required basis.

The Board was represented at The International Coalition annual meeting held in Winnipeg.

Dr. Dickson has represented the Board's interest as part of the integration process required to amalgamate the Manitoba Departments of Natural Resources and Environment.

Mr. Norman Brandson, Deputy Minister for the newly established Manitoba Department of Conservation received a presentation from the Board at the end of the 1999 calendar year.

11.0 Appendices

Two appendices have been prepared to summarize the work of the Board. Appendix I provides a listing of correspondence and advice and recommendations provided to the Minister during the past fiscal year.

It, also, seemed timely and opportune to provide a brief summary of actions and recommendations forwarded in correspondence or in reports to the Minister during the past tenure of the Board. Appendix II, therefore, sets out in abbreviated form those matters brought to the attention of the Minister since March, 1994.

APPENDIX I

SUMMARY OF CORRESPONDENCE TO THE MINISTER (1999-2000)

i. April 21, 1999 Correspondence

Upper Assiniboine River Basin Study

- recommendation to provide resources and extend study period to complete study as planned.
- recommendation to extend drainage moratorium throughout Upper Assiniboine Basin
- encourage and promote ongoing monitoring program for the Assiniboine River
- Board's proposal respecting a river monitoring partnership.

ii. May 4, 1999 Correspondence

Central Manitoba Irrigation Association Presentation

- Board's concern for cumulative affects of approved water license applications in the absence of a water management plan for the Assiniboine River
- risk to agricultural producers because of water shortages during drought periods
- inter-basin transfer considerations
- request for clarification of department's regulatory and enforcement procedures for licensed users during critical drought periods

iii. May 25, 1999 Correspondence

Annual Report to the Manitoba Minister for Natural Resources: 1998-99 Activities

iv. June 30, 1999 Correspondence

Board's comments concerning the Manitoba Water Rights Act

v. August 30, 1979 Correspondence

- Board's concern regarding proposed development of the Assessippi Park and the possible impact of such development on future operation of the Shellmouth Reservoir

- Board's recommendation for an updated and comprehensive cost/benefit examination (using cost accounting techniques) to provide a basis for examining future options regarding the use of the Shellmouth Reservoir.

- Board's suggestion regarding the possible development of a prototype "water management plan" as an output from the Upper Assiniboine River Basin Study.

vi. January 23, 2000 Correspondence

Conclusions of the Healthy Rivers Workshop: Report to the Manitoba Minister of Conservation

vii. March 21, 2000 Correspondence

Board's recommendation concerning extension of the drainage moratorium associated with the Upper Assiniboine River Basin Study.

APPENDIX II

HIGHLIGHTS OF BOARD'S ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (1994-2000)

In formulating a sustainable water-use strategy for the Assiniboine River Basin, the Board has addressed the following during its tenure:

1.0 Based on surplus water availability, an interim water allocation plan for the Assiniboine River proposed a licensing limit of 20,000 acre feet and a minimum target in-stream flow of 200 cfs at Headingly, Manitoba.

While the proposed interim water allocation would permit the removal of the water licensing moratorium imposed by the Minister for the river in 1994, it was, however, contingent upon certain actions being implemented and the development of a comprehensive water management plan for the river.

2.0 While all aspects of water management in the Assiniboine Basin are deemed important, the Board has given priority consideration to the Assiniboine River, the Assiniboine Delta Aquifer and the Shellmouth Reservoir.

3.0 The Board recommended that a sustainable water-use strategy for the Assiniboine Basin should focus on three principal areas:

(a) the "health" of the aquatic system

(b) revised and updated provincial water policies and legislation

(c) a regional forum for water planning and decision-making in which water constitutes one of the key components of sustainable development and environmental protection

4.0 The Board adopted a philosophical statement based on the definition and maintenance of "healthy river systems" as being fundamental to sustained use of the basin. The Departments of Natural Resources and Environment were encouraged to initiate whatever actions may be necessary to assist in defining and maintaining the health of the Assiniboine and other river systems.

5.0 A comprehensive review of the Manitoba Water Rights Act was recommended to establish a new legislation base for managing water in the future. New environmental and sustainable development policies, changing social and economic circumstances, increasing demand for water by competing users require a re-examination of how water is allocated and protected and river basins are managed.

6.0 A new organizational structure is required to plan for water management on river basin and sub-watershed boundaries. The Board has recommended that some form of River Basin secretariat or body be formed to satisfy Assiniboine River water management needs. The Manitoba Water Resources Branch, rather than playing a lead role, would assume a partnership status in a new approach to regional planning and water management in the future.

7.0 The Board recommended guidelines for managing the Assiniboine Delta Aquifer. Together with others, the Board endorsed the establishment of a local board to oversee and advise on the long-term use of the aquifer.

8.0 A new initiative to provide ongoing education and public awareness of the need for change in managing the Assiniboine River and other waters of the basin was identified. While the Board has facilitated information exchange in some areas, a more formal long-term communication network was recognized. The Board offered to assist in this regard pending approval by the Minister.

9.0 The extent to which the operation of the Portage Diversion Reservoir can be modified to supply additional water to the Assiniboine system should be evaluated.

10.0 The Prairie Provinces Apportionment Agreement should be revisited to ensure that it provides and protects Manitoba's shared interest in the prairie water supply, and, to determine the extent to which it provides an appropriate framework for addressing Manitoba's vision of water management in the future.

The Board recommended that the province review the mandate and composition of the Prairie Provinces Water Board to ensure that it can best serve Manitoba's interest as provided by the Apportionment Agreement.

11.0 The Province should determine its commitments to water conservation as a means of (a) making additional water available for a higher priority use and (b) to delay the onset of other more costly water development projects.

12.0 Policies respecting operation of the Shellmouth Reservoir as a water supply facility should be re-examined. Negative impacts associated with a modified operational regime should be considered having regard for remedial works and compensation measures for those landowners and others who may be adversely affected downstream.

13.0 Water supply is key to a sustained water-use strategy for the Assiniboine River Basin. A number of engineering options were identified by the Board as a possible means of increasing the potential water supply for the basin. These included the addition of gates to the Shellmouth spillway; the capture of surplus spring water run-off in natural and/or man made off stream storage facilities; the

development of small and medium sized storage reservoirs; and the feasibility of a Lake Manitoba Supply Canal to augment Assiniboine River flow from Lake Manitoba.

14.0 The Board recognized the importance of water quality objectives for aquatic systems throughout the Assinboine River Basin. Particular attention too water quality objectives for the Assiniboine River was assigned high priority. Water quality objectives are seen to be an integral component of healthy river systems.

15.0 Because of its importance, the Board recommended that an overall water quality management system be established for the basin through a government/private sector sponsored partnership. A central registry for data collection and interpretation should also be considered in this regard.

16.0 Because of the importance of climate and water data to flood forecasting and other water management practices, the Board shared its concern for the dismantling and downsizing of government hydrometric and climatological information networks.

17.0 Planning is urgently needed to address the basin supply-demand requirements to avoid the "crisis management" that often characterizes drought situations and the ever-diminishing supply of water available for licensing from the Assiniboine River.

18.0 Specific considerations were recommended as part of a comprehensive review of the Manitoba Water Rights Act. These included but were not limited to the following:

- shared management responsibilities with local associations and other partners

- a two-tiered allocation system to address water requirements during period of drought and average river flow conditions
- establishing limits to growth in provincial water supply/demand scenarios
- development of a basin water management plan that can readily accommodate fluctuations in river basin water management needs. (the need to translate philosophical considerations into action strategies).
- increased incentives for water conservation and reduced conflict with other government programs (e.g. wetland drainage)
- the desirability an appropriateness of user pay philosophy, royalty fee mechanisms and water marketing strategies

A review of licensing should provide for:

- new fee structure opportunities and adequate monitoring and enforcement practices.
- separation of water rights from land ownership
- transfer and holdback of water rights through some form of water license trading system to ensure the most beneficial use of water
- the use of revenue from water marketing and licensing to support water research, monitoring and management.

19.0 The Board supported the Manitoba Water Resources Branch in its endeavour to resolve long outstanding drainage issues. The Board offered advice as to how this initiative might be pursued. It recommended the establishment of a partnership forum which would provide a planning framework to ensure that activities associated with drainage and flooding are integrated and coordinated at the broader institutional and government level (e.g. provincial departments of

Natural Resources, Rural Development, Agriculture, Environment and Highways).

20.0 The Shellmouth Reservoir and Downstream Flooding Report provided numerous recommendations outlining activities and remedial measures by which to resolve flood related issues in the short term while addressing new water management demands and Shellmouth reservoir operational requirements that may be anticipated in the future. Many of these recommendations were borrowed from the work of the Board.

21.0 The establishment of the Shellmouth Reservoir Regulation Liaison Committee was promoted and encouraged by the Board.

22.0 The Surplus Water Irrigation Initiative provided by the federal and provincial government was, in part, a response to Board findings concerning the need for an adequate water supply. The capture of surplus spring run-off by damming of natural impounment areas and/or the construction of off-stream storage facilities were identified in reports to the Minister.

23.0 An external peer group review of the Shellmouth Reservoir management practices with particular attention to forecasting and monitoring procedures was approved by the Minister at the request of the Board.

24.0 The Board initiated discussion with departmental staff concerning the establishment of an Assiniboine Basin Information System

25.0 The Board, together with the Natural Resource Institute, the Department of Natural Resources and Manitoba Hydro initiated a research project to undertake

a retrospective study of the local impacts resulting from the creation of the Shellmouth Reservoir.

26.0 Recommendations were forwarded concerning the proposed Manitoba Sustainable Development Act.

27.0 An Assiniboine Delta Aquifer report to the Minister recommended broad guidelines for on-going management of the aquifer. As well, the Board recommended the establishment of a local board to guide the management and long-term use of the aquifers.